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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 001513

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [NL](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: NATO AND IRAQ DISCUSSIONS ABOARD USS ENTERPRISE

REF: THE HAGUE 1454 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Daniel R. Russel, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (SBU) Summary: The June 14-15 overnight visit of Dutch Defense Minister Kamp and parliamentarians/officials to the USS Enterprise carrier battle group provided a useful forum for discussions on NATO and Iraq-related issues. Informally, Dutch participants provided candid background regarding the Cabinet's June 11 decision to extend the Dutch troop deployment in Iraq, and assessed that the opposition PvdA party would support the decision in parliament, albeit with some defections. The positive results highlighted the value of ship visits in promoting USG objectives with key host country audiences. End Summary.

2. (U) Dutch Minister of Defense Henk Kamp, incoming CHOD Lt. Gen. Dick Berlijn, RNLAf, and Amb. Sobel led a delegation of Dutch Members of Parliament on an overnight embark aboard USS Enterprise in the Atlantic from June 14-15. All three of the ruling coalition parties, the Christian Democrats, Liberals and Liberal Democrats, as well as the main opposition Labor Party (PvdA) were represented by their floor leaders and/or foreign and defense spokespersons.

3. (U) While onboard USS Enterprise, the Dutch delegation received a briefing from ADM Johnson, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Allied Forces, Southern Europe on current NATO issues to include, the threat profile facing the alliance, NATO-EU relations and the NATO Response Force. The Dutch participants tell us they greatly valued the opportunity to review these issues with a senior NATO commander as well as to witness the operations of the Enterprise Carrier Strike Group and to interact with members of the crew. Dutch participants actively engaged ADM Johnson and each other on questions related to Alliance policy and strategy in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and particularly on the appropriate role for smaller nations like the Netherlands in setting objectives and participating in alliance operations.

4. (C) In addition to the formal briefings and discussions, the overnight visit provided ample opportunity for informal discussions between the Dutch parliamentarians, GONL representatives, and Embassy personnel, some of which provided useful background on the recent cabinet decision to extend the deployment of Dutch troops in Iraq for an additional eight months (reftel). Defense Minister Kamp, for example, confided to Ambassador Sobel that he believed the cabinet had left open the possibility of an additional extension after the end of the eight month period, but that subsequent public statements by PM Balkenende in response to questions from parliament seemed to rule this out. He allowed that the question would be revisited after the January 2005 elections in Iraq.

5. (C) With regard to the upcoming parliamentary debate on the extension decision, Labor Party (PvdA) Defense Affairs Spokesman indicated that he expected the PvdA to support the cabinet's decision, but only after significant internal debate. He suggested that a vote in Parliament would almost certainly come about as the result of a challenge from the smaller Green Left opposition party, in which case some members of the PvdA would probably defect from the party line. The PvdA leadership's objective under these circumstances would be to keep the number of defectors to a minimum -- no more than 10 if possible. He expected that the Parliament's defense committee would discuss the issue on Tuesday, June 22, with a discussion and vote on the floor the next day. (Note: We are beginning to hear from several sources that a vote in parliament is expected to endorse the extension decision resoundingly with the sort of large majority the Dutch prefer to have on national security issues. End Note.)

6. (SBU) Comment: This visit, with its eclectic mix of Dutch parliamentary and government representatives, provided an excellent opportunity to promote U.S./NATO objectives to a diverse audience in a highly favorable environment; it also provided a good opportunity for Dutch parliamentarians from different parties to interact in a non-politicized environment. Dutch participants report they were as

gratified by the chance to engage substantively with ADM Johnson as they were impressed by the capabilities of the USS Enterprise. Defense Minister Kamp repeatedly thanked Ambassador Sobel personally for organizing the visit. By coordinating themes for discussion and objectives prior to the visit, Embassy the Hague and ADM Johnson's staff were able to ensure that discussions on board ship were meaningful. Post believes that such visits are a very useful tool for our objectives among key host country audiences.  
End comment.  
SOBEL